

Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets



(11) EP 1 215 711 A2

(12) EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
19.06.2002 Bulletin 2002/25

(51) Int Cl.7: H01J 49/40

(21) Application number: 01310018.5

(22) Date of filing: 29.11.2001

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE TR
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(72) Inventors:
• Green, Martin
Bowden, Altrincham Cheshire WA14 3EE (GB)
• Jackson, Michael
Warrington, Cheshire WA4 2AZ (GB)

(30) Priority: 29.11.2000 GB 0029040
02.04.2001 GB 0108187

(74) Representative: Jeffrey, Philip Michael
Frank B. Dehn & Co.
179 Queen Victoria Street
London EC4V 4EL (GB)

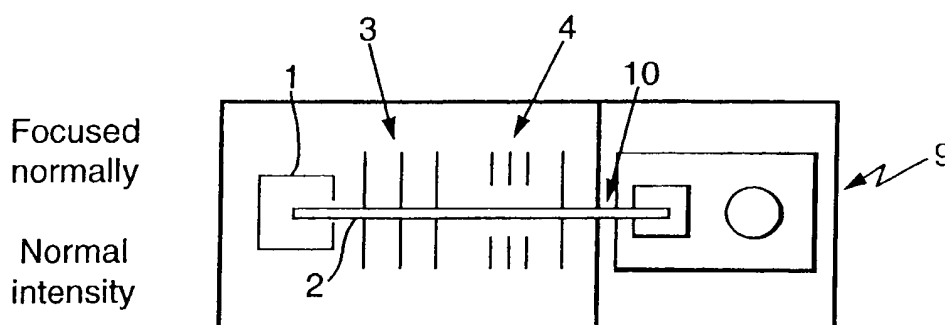
(71) Applicant: Micromass Limited
Manchester M23 9LZ (GB)

(54) Mass spectrometer and methods of mass spectrometry

(57) A way of increasing the dynamic range of a mass spectrometer which incorporates a time to digital converter such as commonly used with a time of flight mass analyser 9 is disclosed. A z-lens 4 upstream of the analyser 9 can be switched between a high sensitivity mode wherein a beam of ions 2 passing therethrough is substantially focused on to the entrance slit 10 of the

analyser 9, and a low sensitivity mode wherein the beam of ions 2 is defocused so that the diameter of the beam substantially exceeds that of the entrance slit 10 of the analyser 9. Obtaining data in the low sensitivity mode in combination with obtaining data in the high sensitivity mode enable an order of magnitude increase in the dynamic range to be obtained.

Fig.2(a).



EP 1 215 711 A2

Description

[0001] The present invention relates to mass spectrometers and methods of mass spectrometry.

[0002] Various types of mass spectrometers are known which use a mass analyser which incorporates a time to digital converter ("TDC") also known as an ion arrival counter. Time to digital converters are used, for example, in time of flight mass analysers wherein packets of ions are ejected into a field-free drift region with essentially the same kinetic energy. In the drift region, ions with different mass-to-charge ratios in each packet of ions travel with different velocities and therefore arrive at an ion detector disposed at the exit of the drift region at different times. Measurement of the ion transit-time therefore determines the mass-to-charge ratio of that particular ion.

[0003] Currently, one of the most commonly employed ion detectors in time of flight mass spectrometers is a single ion counting detector in which an ion impacting a detecting surface produces a pulse of electrons by means of, for example, an electron multiplier. The pulse of electrons is typically amplified by an amplifier and a resultant electrical signal is produced. The electrical signal produced by the amplifier is used to determine the transit time of the ion which struck the detector by means of a time to digital converter which is started once a packet of ions is first accelerated into the drift region. The ion detector and associated circuitry is therefore able to detect a single ion impacting onto the detector.

[0004] However, such ion detectors exhibit a certain dead-time following an ion impact during which time the detector cannot respond to another ion impact. A typical detector dead time may be of the order of 1-5 ns. If during acquisition of a mass spectrum ions arrive during the detector dead-time then they will consequently fail to be detected, and this will have a distorting effect on the resultant mass spectra.

[0005] It is known to use dead time correction software to correct for distortions in mass spectra. However, software correction techniques are only able to provide a limited degree of correction. Even after the application of dead time correction software, ion signals resulting in more than one ion arrival on average per pushout event at a given mass to charge value will result in saturation of the ion detector and hence result in a non-linear response and inaccurate mass determination.

[0006] This problem is particularly accentuated with gas chromatography and similar mass spectrometry applications because of the narrow chromatographic peaks which are typically presented to the mass spectrometer which may be, for example, 2 seconds wide at the base.

[0007] Known time of flight mass spectrometers therefore suffer from a limited dynamic range especially in certain particular applications.

[0008] It is therefore desired to provide an improved mass spectrometer and methods of mass spectrometry.

[0009] According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 1.

[0010] The mass spectrometer according to the preferred embodiment enables the dynamic range of the detector to be extended. In particular, it is possible to alternate between two or more sensitivity ranges during an acquisition. One range is tuned to have a high sensitivity. A second range is adjusted to be at a lower sensitivity than the first range by a factor of up to $\times 100$. Preferably, the difference in sensitivity between the first and second sensitivity modes is at least a factor $\times 10$, $\times 20$, $\times 30$, $\times 40$, $\times 50$, $\times 60$, $\times 70$, $\times 80$, $\times 90$ or $\times 100$.

[0011] Exact mass measurements can be made using a single point lock mass common to both high and low sensitivity ranges.

[0012] Although in the preferred embodiment the sensitivity is changed by the operation of a z-lens, other embodiments are also contemplated wherein in a more general arrangement, the ion optical system between the ion source and the mass analyser is altered or changed so that ions passing therethrough are focused/defocused thereby altering the ion transmission efficiency. It is possible to change the ion transmission efficiency by a number of methods, including: (i) altering a y-focusing lens, which may be an Einzel lens; (ii) altering a z-focusing lens, which may be an Einzel lens; (iii) using a stigmatic focusing lens, preferably having a circular aperture, which focuses/defocuses an ion beam in both the y- and z-directions; and (iv) using a dc quadrupole lens which can focus/defocus in the y-direction and/or the z-direction as desired.

[0013] Utilising z-focusing is preferred to other ways of altering the ion transmission efficiency since it has been found to minimise any change in resolution, mass position and spectral skew which otherwise seem to be associated with focussing/deflecting the ion beam in the y-direction. However, in less preferred embodiments the ion beam may be altered in the y-direction either instead of the z-direction or in addition to the z-direction.

[0014] At least an order of magnitude increase in the dynamic range can be achieved with the preferred embodiment. It has been demonstrated that the dynamic range can be extended from about 3.25 orders of magnitude to about 4.25 orders of magnitude with a GC (gas chromatography) peak width of about 1.5s at half height.

[0015] Preferably, the ion source is a continuous ion source. Further preferably, the ion source is selected from the group comprising: (i) an electron impact ("EI") ion source; (ii) a chemical ionisation ("CI") ion source; and (iii) a field ionisation ("FI") ion source. All these ion sources may be coupled to a gas chromatography (GC) source. Alternatively, and particularly when using a liquid chromatography (LC) source either an electrospray or an atmospheric pressure chemical ionisation ("AP-CI") ion source may be used.

[0016] Preferably, the mass analyser comprises a time to digital converter.

[0017] Preferably, the mass analyser is selected from the group comprising: (i) a quadrupole mass analyser; (ii) a magnetic sector mass analyser; (iii) an ion trap mass analyser; and (iv) a time of flight mass analyser, preferably an orthogonal acceleration time of flight mass analyser.

[0018] Preferably, the mass spectrometer further comprises control means arranged to alternately or otherwise regularly switch the z-lens, or more generally the ion optics, back and forth between at least first and second modes. In this embodiment, two data streams are stored as two discrete functions presenting two discrete data sets. Once the ratio of the high sensitivity to low sensitivity data has been determined, the data can be used to yield linear quantitative calibration curves over four orders of magnitude. Furthermore, the system can be arranged so that exact mass data can be extracted from either trace. Therefore, if a particular eluent produces a mass spectral peak which is saturated in the high sensitivity data set and therefore exhibits poor mass measurement accuracy, the same mass spectral peak may be unsaturated and correctly mass measured in the lower sensitivity trace. By using a combination of both traces, as a sample elutes exact mass measurements may be produced over a wide range of sample concentration.

[0019] The relative dwell times in the high and low sensitivity modes may either be the same, or in one embodiment more time may be spent in the higher sensitivity mode than in the lower sensitivity mode. For example, the relative time spent in a high sensitivity mode compared with a low sensitivity mode may be at least 50:50, 60:40, 70:30, 80:20, or 90:10. In other words, at least 50%, 60%, 70%, 80% or 90% of the time may be spent in the higher sensitivity mode compared with the lower sensitivity mode.

[0020] Alternatively, the control means may be arranged to switch the z-lens, or more generally the ion optics, from the first mode to the second mode when the detector is approaching or experiencing saturation and/or to switch the z-lens, or more generally the ion optics, from the second mode to the first mode when a higher sensitivity is possible without the detector substantially saturating in the first mode. According to the preferred embodiment, low mass peaks may be ignored in the determination of whether or not to switch sensitivities and in one embodiment it is only if mass peaks falling within a specific mass to charge range (e.g. $m/z \geq 50$, or 75, or 100) saturate or approach saturation that the control means switches sensitivity modes. Additionally/alternatively to ignoring saturation of low mass peaks and concentrating on mass peaks in one or more specific mass ranges (which are preferably predefined, but in less preferred embodiments do not necessarily need to be), the control means may switch sensitivity modes based upon whether specific, preferably predetermined, mass peaks are approaching saturation or are saturated, or if an improved mass spectrum including that specific

mass peak could be obtained by switching to a different sensitivity mode.

[0021] Preferably, the mass spectrometer further comprises a power supply capable of supplying from -100 to +100V dc to the z-lens. In one embodiment, the z-lens may be a three part Einzel lens wherein the front and rear electrodes are maintained at substantially the same dc voltage, e.g. for positive ions around -40V dc, and an intermediate electrode may be varied, for positive ions, from approximately -100V dc in the high sensitivity (focusing) mode anywhere up to approximately +100V dc in the low sensitivity (defocusing) mode. For example, in the low sensitivity mode a voltage of -50V dc, +0V dc, +25V dc, +50V dc or +100V dc may be applied to the central electrode.

[0022] According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 18.

[0023] Preferably, when the z-lens defocuses a beam of ions passing through the z-lens, the beam of ions is diverged to have a profile or area which substantially exceeds the profile or area of an entrance aperture to the mass analyser by at least a factor x2, x4, x10, x25, x50, x75, or x100.

[0024] According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 20.

[0025] Preferably, in the first mode at least 85%, 90%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or substantially 100% of the ions are arranged to pass through the entrance aperture.

[0026] Preferably, in the second mode less than or equal to 15%, 10%, 5%, 4%, 3%, 2%, or 1% of the ions are arranged to pass through the entrance aperture.

[0027] Preferably, the difference in sensitivity between the first and second mode is at least x10, x20, x30, x40, x50, x60, x70, x80, x90 or x100.

[0028] According to a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 24.

[0029] According to a fifth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of mass spectrometry as claimed in claim 25.

[0030] According to a sixth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 26.

[0031] According to a seventh aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 27.

[0032] According to one embodiment, the ion optical system is arranged and adapted to be operated in at least three different sensitivity modes. In yet further embodiments four, five, six etc. up to practically an indefinite number of sensitivity modes may be provided.

[0033] According to an eighth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 31.

[0034] According to a ninth aspect of the present in-

vention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 32.

[0035] According to a tenth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 34.

[0036] Various embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 shows an arrangement of y-focusing lenses and a z-lens upstream of a mass analyser;
Figs. 2(a) and (b) show side views of a mass spectrometer according to a preferred embodiment;
Fig. 3 shows a plan view of a mass spectrometer coupled to a gas chromatograph; and
Fig. 4 shows experimental data illustrating the extended dynamic range which is achievable with the preferred embodiment.

[0037] A preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be described. Fig. 1 shows an ion source 1, preferably an electron impact or chemical ionisation ion source. An ion beam 2 emitted from the ion source 1 travels along an axis commonly referred to as the x-axis. The ions in the beam 2 are focused in a first y-direction as shown in the Figure by y-focusing and collimating lenses 3. A z-lens 4, preferably downstream of the y-lens 3, is arranged to deflect or focus the ions in a second z-direction which is perpendicular to both the first y-direction and to the x-axis. The z-lens 4 may comprise a number of electrodes, and may in one embodiment comprise an Einzel lens wherein the front and rear electrodes are maintained at substantially the same fixed dc voltage, and the dc voltage applied to an intermediate electrode may be varied to alter the degree of focusing/defocusing of an ion beam 2 passing therethrough. An Einzel lens may also be used for the y-lens 3. In less preferred arrangements, either a z-lens 4 or a y-lens 3 (but not both) may be provided.

[0038] Figs. 2(a) and (b) show side views of a mass spectrometer. In Fig. 2(a) the beam of ions 2 emitted from an ion source 1 is shown passing through the y-focusing and collimating lens 3. The z-lens 4 operating in a first (higher sensitivity) mode focuses the beam 2 substantially within the acceptance area and acceptance angle of an entrance slit 10 of the mass analyser 9 so that a substantial proportion of the ions (i.e. normal intensity) subsequently enter the analyser 9 which is positioned downstream of the entrance slit 10.

[0039] Fig. 2(b) shows the z-lens 4 operating in a second (lower sensitivity) mode wherein the z-lens 4 defocuses the beam of ions 2 so that the beam of ions 2 has a much larger diameter or area than that of the entrance slit 10 to the mass analyser 9. Accordingly, a much smaller proportion of the ions (i.e. reduced intensity) will subsequently enter the analyser 9 in this mode of operation compared with the mode of operation shown in Fig. 2(a) since a large percentage of the ions will fall outside

of the acceptance area and acceptance angle of the entrance slit 10.

[0040] Fig. 3 shows a plan view of a preferred embodiment. A removable ion source 1 is shown together with a gas chromatography interface or reentrant tube 7 which communicates with a gas chromatography oven 6. A lock mass inlet is typically present but is not shown. A beam of ions 2 emitted by the ion source 1 passes through lens stack and collimating plates 3,4 which includes a switchable z-lens 4. The z-focusing lens 4 is arranged in a field free region of the optics and is connected to a fast switching power supply capable of supplying from -100 to +100V DC. With positive ions, -100 V dc will focus an ion beam 2 passing therethrough and a more positive voltage, e.g. up to +100V dc, will substantially defocus a beam of ions 2 passing therethrough and thereby reduce the intensity of the ions entering the analyser 9.

[0041] Initially, the system may be tuned to full (high) sensitivity. The z-focusing lens voltage may then be varied, preferably manually, until the desired lower sensitivity is reached. In one embodiment, acquisition then results in fast switching of the z-lens power supply between two (or more) pre-determined voltages so as to repetitively switch between high and low sensitivity modes of operation. High and low sensitivity spectra may be stored as separate functions to be post processed. In an alternative embodiment, the z-lens 4 only switches between higher and lower sensitivity modes (and vice versa) when either the detector 13 is being saturated in one mode or the sensitivity can be improved in another mode without saturation.

[0042] Downstream of ion optics 3,4 is an automatic pneumatic isolation valve 8. The beam of ions 2 having passed through ion optics 3,4 then passes through an entrance slit or aperture 10 into the analyser 9. Packets of ions are then injected into the drift region of the preferably orthogonal acceleration time of flight mass analyser 9 by pusher plate 11. Packets of ions are then preferably reflected by reflectron 12. The ions contained in a packet are temporally separated in the drift region and are then detected by detector 13 which preferably incorporates a time to digital converter in its associated circuitry.

[0043] Fig. 4 shows experimental data illustrating that the dynamic range can be extended from about 3.25 orders of magnitude to about 4.25 orders of magnitude (for a GC peak width of 1.5s at half height) using a combination of data from both the high and low sensitivity data sets. In this particular case, the system was tuned to give a ratio of approximately 80:1 between the high and low sensitivity data sets. The experiment allowed equal acquisition time for both data sets by alternating between the two sensitivity ranges between spectra.

[0044] Standard solutions ranging in concentration from 10 pg to 100ng of HCB (Hexachlorobenzene) were injected via the gas chromatograph. The peak area response (equivalent to the ion count) for the reconstruct-

ed ion chromatogram of mass to charge ratio 283.8102 was plotted against the concentration. The results from the low sensitivity data set were multiplied by x80 before plotting to normalise them to the high sensitivity data set.

Claims

1. A mass spectrometer comprising:

an ion source (1) for emitting a beam of ions (2); collimating and/or focusing means (3) downstream of said ion source (1) for collimating and/or focusing said beam of ions (2) in a first (y) direction;
a lens (4) downstream of said collimating and/or focusing means (3) for deflecting and/or focusing said beam of ions (2) in a second (z) direction perpendicular to said first (y) direction;
a mass analyser (9) downstream of said lens (4), said mass analyser (9) having an entrance region (10) for receiving ions, said ions being subsequently transmitted through said mass analyser (9), said mass analyser (9) further comprising a detector (13);

characterised in that:

said lens (4) is arranged and adapted to be operated in at least a first relatively higher sensitivity mode and to automatically switch to a second relatively lower sensitivity mode, wherein in said second mode ions are defocussed by said lens (4) so that substantially fewer ions are received in said entrance region (10) of said mass analyser (9) than in said first mode.

2. A mass spectrometer as claim in claim 1, wherein said ion source (1) is a continuous ion source.
3. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 2, wherein said ion source (1) is selected from the group comprising (i) an electron impact ("EI") ion source; (ii) a chemical ionisation ("CI") ion source; and (iii) a field ionisation ("FI") ion source.
4. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 3, wherein said ion source (1) is coupled to a gas chromatograph.
5. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 2, wherein said ion source (1) is selected from the group comprising (i) an electrospray ion source; and (ii) an atmospheric pressure chemical ionisation ("APCI") source.
6. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 5, wherein said ion source (1) is coupled to a liquid chromatograph.

graph.

7. A mass spectrometer as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein said mass analyser (9) comprises a time to digital converter.
8. A mass spectrometer as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein said mass analyser (9) is selected from the group comprising: (i) a quadrupole mass analyser; (ii) a magnetic sector mass analyser; (iii) an ion trap mass analyser; and (iv) a time of flight mass analyser, preferably an orthogonal acceleration time of flight mass analyser.
9. A mass spectrometer as claimed in any preceding claim, further comprising control means arranged to alternately or otherwise regularly switch said lens (5) back and forth between said first and second modes.
10. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 9, wherein said mass spectrometer spends substantially the same amount of time in said first mode as in said second mode.
11. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 9, wherein said mass spectrometer spends substantially more time in said first mode than in said second mode.
12. A mass spectrometer as claimed in any of claims 1-8, further comprising control means arranged to switch said lens (4) from said first mode to said second mode when said detector (13) is approaching or at the limit of its sensitivity and/or to switch said lens (4) from said second mode to said first mode when a higher sensitivity is possible without said detector (13) substantially saturating.
13. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 12, wherein said control means decides whether or not to switch said lens (4) between first and second modes and vice versa by considering whether or not predefined mass peaks or mass peaks within one or more predefined mass ranges are approaching saturation or are substantially saturated.
14. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 13, wherein said predefined mass range(s) includes a range having a mass to charge ratio ("m/z") selected from the group comprising: (i) $m/z \geq 40$; (ii) $m/z \geq 50$; (iii) $m/z \geq 60$; (iv) $m/z \geq 70$; (v) $m/z \geq 80$; (vi) $m/z \geq 90$; (vii) $m/z \geq 100$; and (viii) $m/z \geq 110$.
15. A mass spectrometer as claimed in any preceding claim, further comprising a power supply capable of supplying from -100 to +100V dc to said lens (4).
16. A mass spectrometer as claimed in any preceding

claim, wherein said lens (4) is an Einzel lens comprising a front, intermediate and rear electrode, with said front and rear electrodes being maintained, in use, at substantially the same dc voltage and said intermediate electrode being maintained at a different voltage to said front and rear electrodes.

17. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 16, wherein said front and rear electrodes are arranged to be maintained at between -30 to -50V dc for positive ions, and said intermediate electrode is switchable from a voltage in said first mode of $\leq -80V$ dc, preferably approximately -100V dc, to a voltage $\geq +0V$ dc, preferably approximately +100 V dc.

18. A mass spectrometer comprising:

an electron impact ("EI") or chemical ionisation ("CI") ion source (1);
one or more y-focusing lenses (3) downstream of said ion source (1);
a z-lens (4) downstream of said ion source (1);
a mass analyser (9) downstream of the at least one y-focusing lens (3) and said z-lens (4), said mass analyser (9) comprising a time to digital converter;

characterised in that:

said mass spectrometer further comprises control means for automatically controlling said z-lens (4), wherein said control means is arranged to selectively automatically defocus a beam of ions (2) passing through the z-lens (4).

19. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 18, wherein when said z-lens (4) defocuses a beam of ions (2) passing through the z-lens (4), the beam of ions (2) is diverged to have a profile which substantially exceeds an entrance aperture (10) to said mass analyser (9).

20. A mass spectrometer comprising:

a continuous ion source (1);
a mass analyser (9) having an entrance aperture (10);
a z-lens (5) disposed between said ion source (1) and said mass analyser (9);

characterised in that:

said z-lens (5) is arranged and adapted to be operated in: (i) a first mode so as to focus a beam of ions (2) passing therethrough so that at least 80% of said ions will substantially pass through said entrance aperture (10); and (ii) a second mode so as to defocus a beam of ions

(2) passing therethrough so that 20% or less of said ions will substantially pass through said entrance aperture (10).

21. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 20, wherein in said first mode at least 85%, 90%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or substantially 100% of said ions are arranged to pass through said entrance aperture (10).

22. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 20 or 21, wherein in said second mode less than or equal to 15%, 10%, 5%, 4%, 3%, 2%, or 1% of said ions are arranged to pass through said entrance aperture (10).

23. A mass spectrometer as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the difference in sensitivity between said first mode and second mode is at least $\times 10$, $\times 20$, $\times 30$, $\times 40$, $\times 50$, $\times 60$, $\times 70$, $\times 80$, $\times 90$ or $\times 100$.

24. A mass spectrometer comprising:

an ion source (1);
a lens (4) downstream of said ion source (1);
a detector (13) downstream of said lens (4);

characterised in that:

said lens (4) focuses a beam of ions in a first mode of operation and substantially defocuses a beam of ions in a second mode of operation, wherein a control means is arranged to automatically switch said lens (4) between said first and second modes of operation.

25. A method of mass spectrometry comprising:

providing an ion source (1) for emitting a beam of ions (2);
providing collimating and/or focusing means (3) downstream of said ion source (1) for collimating and/or focusing said beam of ions (2) in a first (y) direction;
providing a lens (4) downstream of said collimating and/or focusing means (3) for deflecting or focusing said beam of ions (2) in a second (z) direction perpendicular to said first direction (y);
providing a mass analyser (9) downstream of said lens (4), said mass analyser (9) having an entrance region (10) for receiving ions, said ions being subsequently transmitted through said mass analyser (9), said mass analyser further comprising a detector (13);

characterised in that said method further comprises the step of:

arranging and adapting said lens (4) so as to be operable in at least a first relatively higher sensitivity mode and to automatically switch to a second relatively lower sensitivity mode, wherein in said second mode ions are defocussed by said lens (5) so that substantially fewer ions are received in said entrance region (10) of said mass analyser (9) than in said first mode.

26. A mass spectrometer comprising:

an ion source (1) for emitting a beam of ions (2) along an x-axis;
a z-lens (4) for deflecting and/or (de)focusing said beam of ions;
a mass analyser (9) having an entrance acceptance profile;

characterised in that:

said z-lens (4) is arranged to automatically switch between two modes: (i) a higher sensitivity mode wherein said z-lens (4) focuses said beam of ions (2) so that >60%, preferably >75%, of said ions fall within the entrance acceptance profile of said mass analyser (9); and (ii) a lower sensitivity mode wherein said z-lens (4) defocuses said beam of ions (2) so that <40%, preferably <25%, of said ions fall within the entrance acceptance profile of said mass analyser (9).

27. A mass spectrometer, comprising:

an ion source (1) for emitting a beam of ions (2);
an ion optical system (3,4) downstream of said ion source (1) for focusing a beam of ions (2) passing therethrough;
a mass analyser (9) downstream of said ion optical system (3,4);

characterised in that:

said ion optical system (3,4) is arranged to automatically switch between at least a first relatively higher sensitivity mode and at least a second relatively lower sensitivity mode, wherein in said second mode ions are defocussed by said ion optical system (3,4) so that fewer ions are transmitted to said mass analyser (9) than in said first mode.

28. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 27, wherein said ion optical system (3,4) is arranged to automatically switch between three or more different sensitivity modes.

29. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 27 or 28, wherein the ion optical system (3,4) is arranged to spend approximately the same amount of time in said first mode as it spends in said second mode.

30. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 27 or 28, wherein the ion optical system (3,4) is arranged to spend substantially more time in said first relatively higher sensitivity mode than in said second relatively lower sensitivity mode.

31. A mass spectrometer comprising:

an ion source (1) for emitting a beam of ions substantially along an x-axis;
ion optical means (3,4) for focusing and defocusing said beam of ions in a y-direction perpendicular to said x-axis and/or in a z-direction perpendicular to said y-direction and said x-axis;
a mass analyser (9) downstream of said ion optical means (3,4), said mass analyser (9) comprising a detector (13);

characterised in that:

said mass spectrometer further comprises automatic control means for automatically switching said ion optical means either:

(i) repetitively and regularly between a first higher sensitivity mode wherein said ion optical means (3,4) focuses an ion beam (2) passing therethrough and a second lower sensitivity mode wherein said ion optical means (3,4) defocuses an ion beam (2) passing therethrough; or
(ii) from a higher sensitivity mode wherein said ion optical means (3,4) focuses an ion beam (2) passing therethrough to a lower sensitivity mode wherein said ion optical means (3,4) defocuses an ion beam (2) passing therethrough, said switching between sensitivity modes being made upon determining that particular mass peaks in a mass spectrum or equivalent thereof are saturating or approaching saturation and/or mass peaks within a particular mass range in a mass spectrum or equivalent thereof are saturating or approaching saturation.

32. A mass spectrometer comprising:

an ion source (1) for emitting a beam of ions substantially along an x-axis;
ion optical means (3,4) for focusing and defocusing said beam of ions in a y-direction per-

pendicular to said x-axis and/or in a z-direction perpendicular to said y-direction and said x-axis;

a mass analyser (9) downstream of said ion optical means (3,4), said mass analyser comprising a detector (13);

characterised in that:

said mass spectrometer is arranged to automatically adjust said ion optical means (3,4) so that either: (i) data at a relatively high sensitivity and at a relatively low sensitivity are obtained at substantially the same time; or (ii) only data at a first sensitivity is obtained until it is automatically determined that data at an improved second sensitivity may be obtained, at which point data at said second sensitivity is then obtained.

33. A mass spectrometer as claimed in claim 32, wherein said mass analyser (9) comprises a time of flight mass analyser.

34. A mass spectrometer comprising:

ion optical means (3,4) for selectively focusing and defocusing a beam of ions (2) passing therethrough, said ion optical means (3,4) being positioned upstream of a mass analyser (9); and
automatic control means for automatically varying said ion optical means (3,4) thereby altering the focusing and defocusing of a beam of ions (2) passing therethrough so as to alter the intensity of ions subsequently entering said mass analyser (9).

Fig.1.

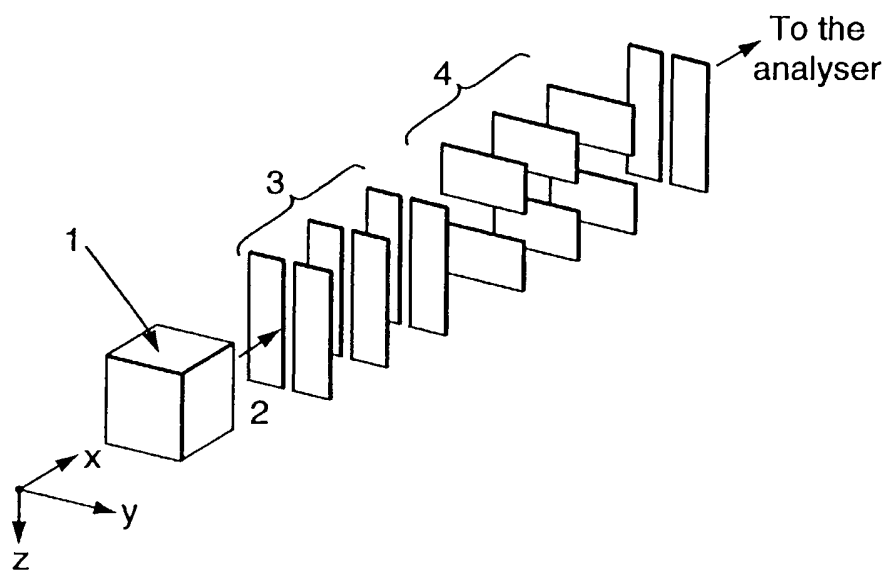


Fig.2(a).

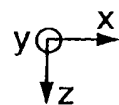
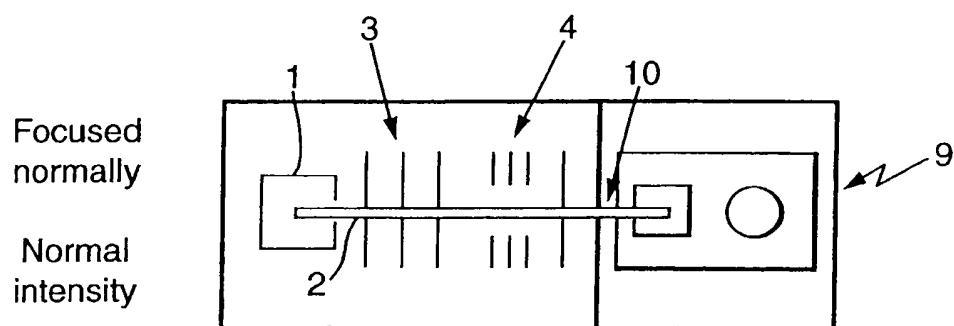
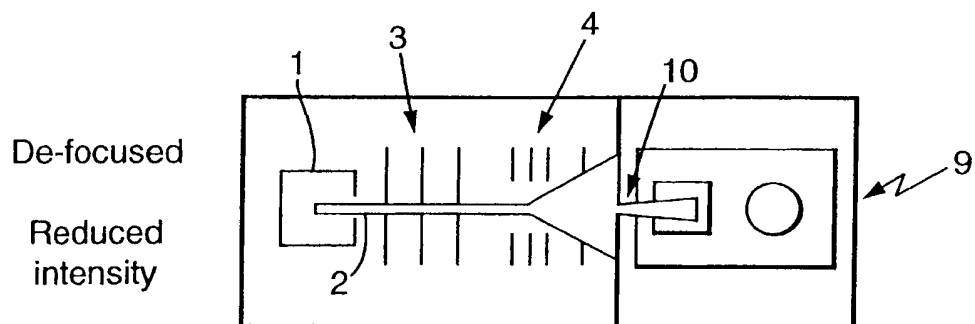


Fig.2(b).



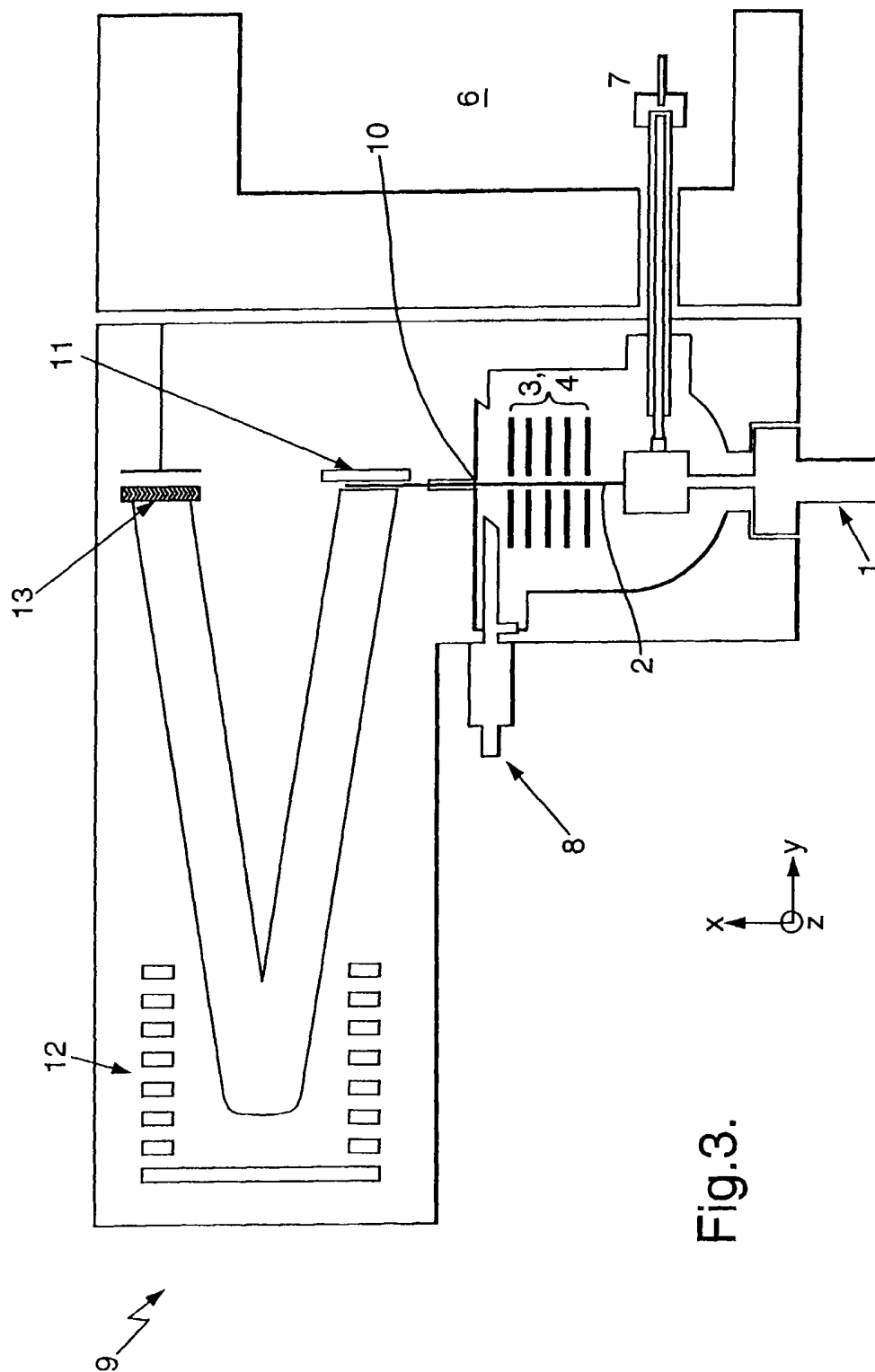


Fig.3.

Fig.4.

